

TEEM Education

Content Evaluation



Description

Wordshark 4 is a comprehensive program held on a CD. It includes fifty five games and nine thousand pre-recorded words and sounds arranged over six alternative courses. Each game is designed to help with one or more aspects of learning to read and spell.

The program acknowledges that it has used the following in the preparation of the various courses that it holds on the CD; Letters and Sounds, National Literacy Framework and the use of QCA guidelines in conjunction with preparing the subject word lists for use in the Secondary aspect.

The Alpha to Omega course that is part of the Wordshark 4 program has been based on the word lists that are held on the Alpha to Omega developed by the late Beve Hornsby

The six courses that are held on Wordshark 4 are:

Alpha to Omega - this follows the structure of the book by Beve Hornsby and Frula Shear written to support dyslexics

Letters and Sounds - introduces letters, words and sentences in a systematic, structured manner and which supports the DCSF phonic scheme.

Literacy Hour - based upon the earlier Literacy Framework (DCSF)

Short Course to support different phonic schemes - can be used independently or to support different phonic teaching schemes.

Secondary Subject Lists - covering vocabulary from thirteen curriculum subjects and including words in context.

General Course for older users/adults - a course similar to the Alpha to Omega element on the CD and which makes no reference to a user's age.

Wordshark 4 is a highly adaptable aid to learning to read and spell. It can be adapted in a several ways. Words may be searched for individually or for different phonics pattern to be targeted, it is possible to create individual spelling lists to offer practise of a highly individual nature or to work through elements of a program systematically. It is also possible to target a specific element from, for example, the Literacy Strategy where Year 4 Term 1 is selected and to choose work from this time period. Within the program when some word lists are suggested the program will suggest which games would be most suitable to play.

Within the program it is possible to personalise the selection with a choice of font, background colour, reward games and sprite. Within the games that are shown the speed with which the games move, for example sharks or words, can be speeded up or slowed down.

It is possible to set up a program of work for a student or a group of students. This is easily achieved and undertaken by an administrator. From this the word lists that need to be worked on are highlighted and the games that they can play are selected.

Purpose of the Program

A major benefit of Wordshark 4 is that it can be used alongside other programs to complement teaching benefits or can be used as a stand alone program that can either be dipped into to provide a boost or used systematically to allow continued support and an overriding framework within which to work.

The program can be used to support, for example, Letters and Sounds weekly through its structured phonics games or to provide additional support in Secondary subjects in developing reading and spelling.

Wordshark can be used intensively one week and then used to provide an introduction or plenary to a lesson or lessons in another.

Teacher Controls

When logged on as an administrator, the teacher is able to set up individual or groups of students to work on specific elements of a program. This can include creating wordlists specific to that group. This can easily be accomplished using 'Create your own word lists' from the tool bar at the top of the Wordshark screen.

More than one teacher can use this facility to set work for an individual student and the student has the opportunity to select which teachers' work they attempt.

If the pupils have signed in as other than 'temporary' their records and scores will be held for scrutiny and future planning.

It is necessary to be signed on as an administrator to be able to manage students. This allows the creation of groups of students, the addition and deletion of students, renaming and movement. It also enables the administrator to change student settings for an individual. This includes volume, keyboard, available courses, font, teaching notes, background colour and the use of 'peeps' when playing games. It must be noted though that students can also amend their settings.

The games that students have attempted together with their results can be viewed.

At some stage words may be used in individual lists that the program does not have pre-recorded. These will then need to be recorded by the teacher or by the students. With the use of a microphone this is easily achieved again using the toolbar at the top of the screen.

The use of sound is essential for many of the games as pre-recorded words and sounds are used to support learners. However, using the computer sound facility it is possible to alter the sound and the use of headphones could possibly be a valuable extra! For those who are hearing impaired it is possible to select the use of, where available, pictures, signs or finger spellings.

Curriculum coverage

Wordshark 4 offers very good coverage of many aspects of the reading and spelling areas within the National Literacy Strategy. Within its Literacy Framework section its word selection lists support up to Year 6 Term 1 of the earlier Literacy Framework and listed below are the significant areas that it supports addressing from the National Strategies Primary Framework for Literacy Objectives as detailed on the Internet.

Word Recognition: decoding (reading) and encoding (spelling)

Foundation Stage

- *Explore and experiment with sounds, words and text.
- *Link sounds to letters, naming and sounding the letters of the alphabet
- *Hear and say sounds in words in the order in which they occur.
- *Read simple words by sounding out and blending the phonemes all through the word from left to right.
- *Recognise common digraphs.
- *Read some high frequency words.
- *Use phonic knowledge to write simple regular words and make phonetically plausible attempts at more complex words.

Year 1

- *Recognise and use alternative ways of pronouncing the graphemes taught.
- *Recognise and use alternative ways of spelling the phonemes already taught.
- *Identify the constituent parts of two and three syllable words to suggest the application of phonic knowledge and skills.
- *Recognise automatically an increasing number of familiar high frequency words.
- *Read and spell phonically decodable two and three syllable words.

Year 2

- *Spell with increasing accuracy and confidence drawing on word recognition and knowledge of word structure and spelling patterns.
- *Read and spell less common alternative graphemes including trigraphs.
- *Read high and medium frequency words independently and automatically.

Strand 6 Word Structure and Spelling

Year 1

Spell new words using phonics as the prime approach

*Segment sound into their constituent phonemes in order to spell them correctly.

*Use knowledge of common inflections in spelling.

*Read and spell decodable two and three syllable words.

Year 2

*Spell with increasing accuracy and confidence drawing on word recognition and knowledge of word structure and spelling patterns including common inflections and use of double letters.

*Read and spell less common alternative graphemes including trigraphs.

Year 3

*Spell high and medium frequency words.

*Spell unfamiliar words using known conventions including grapheme-phoneme and morphological rules.

Year 4

*Know and apply common spelling rules.

*Develop a range of personal strategies for learning new and irregular words.

Year 5

*Spell words containing unstressed vowels.

*Know and use less common prefixes and suffixes.

Year 6

*Spell familiar words correctly and employ a range of strategies to spell difficult and unfamiliar words.

The Letters and Sounds section covers work from Phase 2 to Phase 6 with assessment coverage from phases 2 to 6. The work in this section is following the Letters and Sounds framework systematically with the assessment providing a good coverage of those elements of the program covered in that phase. Within the phases it is also possible to revise earlier phase work if desired. The short course to develop different phonic schemes covers all the major phonemes and graphemes in single syllable words.

The general content to suit older users also covers the first 45 high frequency words leading to other areas such as common letter patterns and confusions. The work here would support those older students who have some grounding in literacy but who would benefit from additional work that they can utilise to develop their skills further. It has the same structured content as the Alpha to Omega course.

There are thirteen subjects covered in the secondary section: English, Maths, Drama, Geography, History, PE, RE, Science, D and T, Art, Music, ICT and Citizenship. The work within these subjects covers specific words that need to be known, spelt correctly and used

in context which can be supported when selecting the sentence games. Within the English section there is a KS3 spelling revision section including lists of common misspellings appropriate to this age group.

The Alpha to Omega course was originally written to support learners with SpLd. As it advances in small steps it is ideal to support learning and build confidence.

Across the courses held on the program it is possible to access Help when needed. This is easily located on F1 and when the words are double clicked the help information within the box is read out. This together with the peep and listen facilities which are held at the top of the page ensure that the learner has support throughout.

Wordshark is now being used to support the teaching of foreign vocabulary. For this to be achieved a special keypad must be created which is possible using the admin/advance features for experienced users/change on-screen keypad. Using this and clicking on the necessary characters this facility may be created.

Analysis of Contents

The activities held on Wordshark 4 are well aimed at a wide range of age ranges and user abilities. The program is able to cater for those in Key Stage 1 up to and including older learners.

The games have an appeal to all ages and the competitive element adds to the enthusiasm with which learners approach them. Ensuring that the speed of the games is pitched at an appropriate level so that learners can succeed helps the learner to want to continue and return to games to try and complete the activity in a quicker time. The reward games that are held at the end of each game also add to the fun aspect. The speed element of the program can be adapted to suit the individual.

Although the games remain the same throughout as there are fifty five of them and the vast array of word lists available there are many possibilities to choose from and I have never known anyone become bored! The same game can be played at many levels each pitched with the correct level of challenge for the individual.

The pronunciation is very clear and when words are spoken on screen it is easy to hear them and together with the picture prompts learners are supported throughout.

Ease of use

Wordshark 4 installed easily and quickly although if Wordshark 3 has been used prior to using the updated version it is necessary to back up all data and then to uninstall Wordshark 3 before installing Wordshark 4. This will then ensure that the upgraded version will locate and update the existing files.

Once installed the program is easy to use. It is recommended that an adult becomes an administrator. This allows them to add pupils to the records and manage their programs and to monitor progress and access record keeping.

The Wordshark 4 manual that accompanies the CD is a clear and comprehensive work. It leads the user through the process of using the program from initial installation to more comprehensive matters including troubleshooting.

The information is held in a logical and easy to locate manner. The word lists are held on each of the courses in a structured manner where it is easy to locate which one is required. Accompanying the word lists it is possible to print off word lists for record keeping together with sentence worksheets, wordsearches and flashcards for student use. Should it be considered necessary it is also possible to print off student records.

If for any reason it is not possible to locate what is needed then a quick search will show those lists identified as being possible matches.

Any of the games that are held on the program can be used in a wide variety of ways. They can be used individually by a learner or in a group or whole class situation. The games work well on an interactive white board where they can be used as an introduction or as a consolidation activity. In this way they can be played as a class or as teams.

Quality

Wordshark 4 is a high quality program. It uses cartoon-type artwork to encourage learners to complete games which enable them to practice their reading and spelling.

These activities are very easy to locate. With teacher support it is possible to ensure that they become progressively more difficult thus providing a challenge to learning and a support to development.

Results are held on file to enable the teacher to monitor the learner activity and to ensure that the appropriate level of challenge is provided and monitored.

The pronunciation is clear and easy to understand. There is the facility to check what has been heard and to also provide a prompt if a word or sound has not been heard correctly.

The learner is well supported throughout. If a game is completed without error the learner is led to a reward game where they can choose to try and win 'gold coins.' However, if they fail to spell a word correctly then the correct letter is shown above the word prompting them to enter it and so complete the word correctly.

The teachers' use of records will show which games the learners have selected unless they have a program of work elected for them in which case the games and word list will have been previously entered by an administrator. This enables the teacher to evaluate progress and to plan forwards.

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Differentiation

It is easy to produce differentiated programs of work using Wordshark 4. Through the active use of selecting wordlists and/or games the learner can be comprehensively supported in their development. Within a class using Wordshark 4 it would be possible to have all levels supported and challenged as even if they are accessing the same game they can be working at different levels through the use of different wordlists.

There is also the option of creating 'fast track' or revision lists. These are possible when the red heading on word lists menu is selected. The program then offers to create mixed lists where one word from each list under the current heading is chosen. This presents an additional list that can then be used as required.

As each list can be printed there is the possibility of making additional resources to be used as support aids.

The use of motivation and reward whilst working at the individuals level represents good practice and is certainly valuable in encouraging the individual to strive to improve on their present level of development.

Summary

Wordshark 4 is a comprehensive program of six courses that work on many levels. It can be used in the classroom for whole class teaching through to supporting the individual and from Key Stage 1 to older adult users.

The wide variety of games that it offers that address many aspects of supporting development in reading and writing: reading, spelling, listening for sound, letter pattern recognition, splitting up words, matching (card games), alphabet and dictionary and sentence work ensure that it can be used in many different ways.

With its comprehensive, structured approach and ease of use it is certainly a highly valuable aid to developing this area of literacy.

